

Prologue to a Nation, by Bibi Fadlalla

Commissioned by the Tropenmuseum for *Our Colonial Inheritance*

Bibi Fadlalla (Cairo, 1978) is a Dutch independent filmmaker and visual artist. There is thematic overlap between her work and the exhibition at the Tropenmuseum. She lives and works in the Netherlands, where she earned her Master's degree in Media Studies from the University of Amsterdam. Fadlalla then completed the Documentary Media Studies programme at the New School in New York. In her work, she explores the concept of identity, such as that of the African diaspora. And she is interested in themes connected with migration and belonging.

She debuted in 2012 with her film 'Zwarte Piet en ik', ('Black Pete and I') followed by 'Dat Haar!' ('Look at that Hair!', 2016), 'Kendis' (2017) and 'Father Figure' (2019). Her 2020 film, 'De Vrouwen van Mijn Land' ('The Women of My Country'), about artist Raquel van Haver, was shortlisted for the 2021 Golden Calf award in the category Best Short Documentary. In addition to her films, Fadlalla creates video installations. In everything she does, she tries to highlight the stories of communities that are underrepresented in society.

On her work for *Our Colonial Inheritance*: Prelude to a Nation

Bibi Fadlalla was asked to create the prologue to *Our Colonial Inheritance*. The prologue is the first room of the new permanent exhibition at the Tropenmuseum. 'When they invited me to create the prologue, I was triggered by the lasting influence of the colonial past. Straight away, it evoked images in my head,' the filmmaker says. 'The continued influence is inherent in all kinds of systems in society. I wanted to make it palpable. And visual.'

Fadlalla continues: 'For the film, I was looking for a symbol of history and identity. In my research, I noticed that people often carry national flags in rallies and protests to symbolise their struggle. But contemporary identities are hybrid; people have been shuffled around in colonial times. A national flag does not always correspond to that level of complexity. That's what I tried to express in the installation.'

And so, 'Prelude to a Nation' begins with people walking along the beach in an otherwise undetermined location. Each of the people carries a flag that represents multiple nationalities. The flags were made by artist Navin Thakoer. Each flag combines the Dutch flag with that of another nation. 'To some extent, Dutch colonialism is the connection between the various groups in the Netherlands,' Fadlalla explains. 'Every country has its own history and relates to colonialism and slavery differently. But because of their ties with the Netherlands, they are all connected. Unity in diversity.'

Fadlalla sees the group in this scene as people with a shared hybrid background. 'Like an imaginary new people in an unknown landscape looking for a home.' A group in which Fadlalla sees herself. She grew up in the Netherlands, the child of Sudanese migrants. 'I have several identities. That brings up the question of where home is. Perhaps home is not a physical place. This is a recurring theme in my work. The main characters in my work often live in a number of different worlds. Home as such is no longer a reality because something is lost in the relocation. The search for home becomes a never-ending process. The question is whether the answer can ever be found.' The final element of the installation is a boy explaining that it's all inside him, all those multiple ethnicities and experiences. All those elements make up one's identity. Therein lies the connectedness/ collective experience.

In the film, the repercussions of the past are illustrated by fragments from speeches and the official apologies from Amsterdam Mayor Femke Halsema, King Willem Alexander, and Prime Minister Mark Rutte. 'The call for recognition of the past is growing. Recognition also means recognition of the story of our ancestors and the suffering that was inflicted.' She concludes: 'Because of the commotion, the authorities feel social pressure to address this. In public.'